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US aid to Angola plays role in presummit posturing with Soviets

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President Reagan's UN speech has intensified debate within his administration over proposals for renewed aid to anticommunist rebels in Angola.

Administration backers of legislation to provide \$27 million in non-lethal aid to the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), say the money is needed to demonstrate US resolve in dealing with threats to regional stability posed by Soviet-backed third-world regimes. The legislation's principal sponsor is Rep. Claude Pepper (D) of Florida.

But opponents of the bill, who include Secretary of State George P. Shultz, say the aid package could damage prospects for a negotiated settlement with Angola for the withdrawal of 35,000 Cuban troops and 1,200 Soviet advisers.

In last week's speech before the 40th anniversary session of the UN General Assembly, the President called for the US and Soviet Union to cooperate in a regional peace process "leading to an end to violence, the withdrawal of foreign troops, and national reconciliation in five nations." But the President's calls for cooperation were coupled with implicit warnings that until such cooperation was achieved the US would continue to provide moral and financial support to anti-Marxist insurgents.

Congressional supporters of a bill to provide aid to UNITA say that while \$27 million is not militarily significant, the money is a symbol of US commitment to halting Soviet aggression. They say that with the summit approaching, it's more important than ever for Congress to support the President.

But State Department officials worry that the aid could complicate administration efforts to piece together a series of regional settlements between South Africa and various "front line" neighbors, including Angola.

In an accord the US mediated last year at Lusaka, Zambia, South Africa and Angola agreed to a withdrawal of Cuban troops from Angola in return for a withdrawal

of South African troops from neighboring Namibia (South-West Africa), and eventual Namibian independence.

Hopes for implementing the accord dimmed when Angola broke off contacts with the US. Angola took the action after Congress, in July, repealed the Clark Amend-

ment, which prohibited US aid to UNITA. The Clark Amendment was enacted in 1976 in response to revelations of secret CIA support for UNITA. But hopes for the Lusaka accord were revived last week when two high-ranking US officials, including Assistant Secretary of State Chester A. Crocker, renewed talks with Angolan

President Jose Eduardo dos Santos in New York.

State Department officials insist that US aid to UNITA now will be both militarily useless and politically counterproductive.

"Not only will it hurt negotiations with Angola," says one State Department source. "It will also hurt our image by creating the impression that we're in collusion with South Africa. Anything that ties the US closer to South Africa in the eyes of the world limits our capacity to conduct effective diplomacy. It hurts our credibility as a force for democracy."

But opposition to providing aid to UNITA has left the State Department politically isolated. Department and diplomatic sources say support for the aid package is widespread among many of the President's closest advisers, including top officials at the National Security Council and the Defense Department. Earlier this month, a private appeal from Secretary Shultz to House Minority Leader Robert H. Michel (R) of Illinois to oppose the aid plan was met with a spirited public rejection.

In part, the concern of aid sponsors is political. They say that with the summit coming, it's time to put teeth into Reagan's policy of opposing Soviet expansionism by showing support for UNITA.

"It's necessary because under the Clark Amendment we've had a veiled policy," adds Rep. Jim Courter (R) of New Jersey, a cosponsor of the aid package. "Negotiation will only succeed when there's pressure on the gov-

ernment of Angola." If the aid package falters, says Representative Courter, the result will "embolden and encourage the Soviets to stick with their policy of continuing military force to stamp out UNITA."

That force was demonstrated during a major offensive launched last summer by the Soviet-backed Angolan army. It was finally stopped in late September, just short of UNITA headquarters. But heavy losses sustained in the process have prompted UNITA leader Jonas Savimbi to directly request assistance.

Sponsors of legislation for Angola say it's still too early to gauge the depth of congressional support for the measure. But they add that public backing for the President's position, which many say now appears likely, could help complete the reversal of US policy toward Angola begun with the repeal of the Clark Amendment.